The lives of jornaleras and jornaleros in Baja California Sur ©

RESULTS FROM A DIRECT SURVEY
Over the last four decades, many large and medium size agribusinesses located in the state of Baja California Sur in Northwest Mexico, hire “jornaleras and jornaleros” (Spanish for seasonal migrant workers). They migrate from rural areas of Southern Mexico such as the Sierra of Veracruz, Puebla, and the mountains of Guerrero and Oaxaca where poverty is rampant, unemployment is high, and salaries are low.

Jornaleras and jornaleros migrate for subsistence, yet they continue to be victims of an array of human rights abuses. This abuse comes from owners and managers of agribusinesses and many times from work and safety authorities.

Seasonal migrants arrive in Baja California Sur (BCS) with the hope of earning money by cultivating and packaging vegetables. They work for companies that export goods and are totally or partially owned by foreigners.

During the high season, the amount of migrants arriving in BCS is calculated at approximately 30,000 people; some come alone, others in couples, or with their families. Most of the migrants are indigenous and belong to diverse ethnic groups, having their own distinct traditional cultures and languages. These languages and cultural differences among groups play against the unity of migrants since individually and as families they tend to unite with those from their own ethnic group.

Jornaleras and jornaleros, including adolescents and sometimes children work long shifts, living in small provisional housing on company property. They earn very low wages and most of the time have no health or other social benefits. Most women live with their partners and families and work double shifts (one in the field, the other at home) and have very little time to rest and sleep. Companies are located in isolated desert areas so jornaleras and jornaleros are forced to buy their groceries and other basic needs at company stores with scarce and pricy goods.

Once the harvest is done, the work is over for the migrants that were hired, and everybody needs to go. Jornaleras and jornaleros must look for work in other camps or return to their state of origin and return to BCS the next growing season. Some migrant workers stay in Baja California Sur for eight months while some of them stay for periods of two to three years. The government of Baja California Sur does not include specific policies for jornaleras and jornaleros with the justification that migrant seasonal workers are not permanent residents of, and therefore do not belong to, BCS.
THE SURVEY BY CENTRO MUJERES
Direct Interviews of Jornaleras and Jornaleros

In 2010 Centro Mujeres conducted a study about the work and living conditions of jornaleras and jornaleros.

253 migrant workers

How many people participated in the study?
The sample size consisted of 253 people interviewed. Half of sample were women and the other half men.

Centro Mujeres visited 11 agribusinesses throughout the state of Baja California Sur.
The great majority of these businesses produce tomatoes and chilies, while others produce cucumbers, squash, strawberries, basil and cilantro.

* These products are for export.

Why were they migrating to Baja California Sur?
The main reasons for migrating to BCS from southern states in Mexico: 88% of women and 83% of men mentioned that the main causes of migration to BCS were unemployment and low wages in their home state. They come to BCS with the hope of earning more money than in their states of origin.

Once they arrived in BCS, do they stay in BCS?
Most of the seasonal workers stay for the amount of time arranged in their contracts. 42% of the study participants had been in BCS for less than six months, 30% have been working between six months and one year. 28% of the workers interviewed stayed longer, between 2 and 5 years because they decided to stay in BCS and not return to their states of origin.
“I came with the hope to fight for life and to help my mom”

(Amalia, 19 years old, from Veracruz)
Is BCS the first state where they migrate?

66%

Of migrants surveyed had already migrated to two or three states before arriving in BCS; generally coming from the northern states of Baja California and Sinaloa. The rest were leaving their state of origin for the first time.

Where are they coming from?

Jornaleras and jornaleros that participated in the study were mainly from the Sierra of Veracruz and from the rural areas of Michoacán, Oaxaca, Sinaloa and Guerrero. The majority of them were living in rural farming communities, however, 17% of jornaleros interviewed came from fishing villages.

Do they come alone or with their relatives?

Half of the workers arrived to BCS with their families; the other half came alone or with their partners. While living in the agricultural fields, 57% of the ones coming with their partners remained together. Half of the workers arrive in BCS with their families. The other half came alone or with their partners. While living in the agricultural fields, of those coming with their partners remained together.

Who are the jornaleras and jornaleros migrating for work in BCS?

They are laborers and farmworkers whose families are dedicated to agricultural work in their states of origin.

What is their age range?

More than half of the workers interviewed were young people under 30 years of age. They live in common law relationships or marry before the age of 20.
What is their level of education?

34% (86) of the participants never attended school.

46% of women declared that they know how to read and write.

40.5% of men said that they can read and write.

A third of the sample said they wish to continue studying, but they do not have the time to do it.

The Children of Jornaleros and Jornaleras

72% of survey participants had children living with them.

52% of household had children younger than five years of age.

38% of household had children between 6 and 12 years of age.

Many of these children help their parents picking up produce in the fields. In general, small children remain at day care centers within the ranches, but many children older than six do not attend school due to lack of proper official papers (only 43% brought proper identification documents with them to BCS for their children.)
**WORKING CONDITIONS**

87% of the 253 respondents worked in the fields planting and picking. The rest worked in packaging or fumigation.

48% of jornaleras and jornaleros worked between 50 and 60 hours a week.

25% Worked 48 hours per week.

27% worked less than 48 hours weekly.

According to study participants, salaries were in general higher than in their states of origin.

53% of participants declared making more money than in their state of origin. Money is usually spent on basic needs such as food and clothing.

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**Do they have savings capacity with the money they get paid at the ranches in BCS?**

81% of the study participants stated that before coming to BCS they were not able to save a penny. While in BCS, 55% of the participants did not save money. For those who were able to save some money, their priorities were: buying a piece of land and/or build a house in their state of origin, and return home with savings to benefit their families.

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**Do they have social benefits?**

None of the workers were given benefits to be able to access social housing in the country. 40% declared that they didn’t receive health benefits or insurance of any kind. More than half of the workers (55%) received childcare services. Some workers (24%) received basic food packages as a contribution from the agribusinesses while they lived on the ranches.
“I had to drop out of school to work in the field... for survival... but when work ended in Veracruz, I had to migrate. Here the pay is very little but at least there is work.”

(Valentin, 19 years old, from the sierra of Veracruz).
What is the situation of the jornaleras and jornaleros?

- **20%** of the participants said that they never went to the doctor in their lives because they said they “never get sick.”
- **34%** said they used the clinic at the ranch.
- **25%** went to public health clinics.
- The main reason given by **jornaleras** and **jornaleros** for not using public health services was: “health services are bad.”
- **33%** self-medicate or didn’t do anything if they got sick.

What happened if their children got sick?

- 53% used the health clinic at the ranch, and 40% used public health clinics. The rest went to private doctors.
- 36% (91) of them said they use pesticides as part of their job, however, 16% (40) didn’t know the name of the substances they use. 45 jornaleros who use substances referred to having health problems related to use of chemicals such as dermatitis and itching, headaches and respiratory problems.

Do they use pesticides or chemicals in their job?

How is their reproductive health?

- **52%** of women declared having never used a contraceptive method.
- **18%** of women used an I.U.D.
- **20%** of women had a tubal ligation.
- Condom use was very low. Only **4%** of women declared using condoms.
- **53%** of the women affirmed that they had never had a pap smear.
- 23% reported having irregular menstrual cycles.
- 12% of the women declared having had at least one miscarriage.
“Our skin recovers so much once we go back home and stay for a while in our hometowns!”

(Silvia, 28 years old, from Oaxaca).
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

How is the situation of Violence Against Women and Children in the ranches?

- 40% of women referred having had at least one fight or discussion with her partner during “the last month.”
- 14% of the women declared having between 4 and 10 fights with their partners.
- 5% of female participants admitted that their partners are physically violent.
- 52% of participants (129) declared that if they have a personal problem they don't tell anybody.
- 17% mentioned that they use the services of the social worker at the ranch.
- Most “fights” consisted of verbal and emotional violence, such as insults and yelling.

What were their plans after finishing their contracts at these ranches?

While 30% of them admitted that they don't know what they will do next, 49% planned to return home to their states of origin. The rest planned to stay working in the northern circle of agribusinesses.

"Some men behave badly with their partners. Battered women go to work the next day and you feel bad to see them like that."

(Marcos, 32 years old, from Guerrero.)
CONCLUSIONS

While the communities of jornaleras and jornaleros have great need for their own survival, and are not well informed about their rights, agribusinesses maintain poor working and living conditions on their lands.

Jornaleras and jornaleros living in Baja California Sur suffer violations of diverse human rights year after year. Centro Mujeres' study shows that migrant workers had at least six human rights violated; rights that are protected by national instruments (Mexico’s Constitution, federal and state laws) as well as by international agreements (the U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights). These rights include the right to health, the right to education, the right of self-determination and prevention from discrimination, the right to favorable conditions at work, safe and healthy conditions, rest and leisure; the right to adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Municipal and state government agencies of Baja California Sur are failing to protect and guarantee the human rights of thousands of jornaleras and jornaleros living a great part of the year on BCS soil. There is an imperative need to create state and municipal programs to improve living and working conditions of migrant communities. There is also an urgent need for a plan of action based on interagency collaborative work with the participation of jornalero communities and with the support of local civil society.

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